

## Doctrine - Christ's Return

Sign Title: Christ's Return

November 14, 2010

Good to see you this morning! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. If you are new, I would like to welcome you. This fall, we are in a series of studies called, "Doctrine - What do we believe?" The purpose of these studies is to review the basics of our faith. We are in the home stretch of the series. This week we are studying *Christ's Return*. Next week, we will finish things up as we talk about *Response and Final Destiny*.

Also to remind you that in a few weeks we will vote to adopt the new EFCA Statement of Faith. You can find it on the home page of our web site and printed copies are available in the foyer. When you read through it, you will notice I didn't teach through all of it but rather took the key phrase for each point and taught that. So don't freak out if you realize I didn't preach a particular detail in the explanatory paragraphs, I purposely skipped stuff.

That being said, we have a lot to cover this week because I am covering part of next weeks material this morning since next week will be our big Awana celebration and I want to keep our teaching time a little shorter than normal next week.

By way of introduction, I want to ask if you have noticed something has gone terribly wrong. Have you noticed the world is broken? There is violence, abuse, poverty, sickness, disease, death, natural disasters, tyranny and evil. Despite years of works, trillions of dollars, countless wars to kill the bad guys, the

best efforts of leaders, the collective wisdom of presidents, court justices and our representatives in the house and the senate, the world is still a mess.

If we look in the mirror long enough, we all come to realize that even though we desperately want a solution to the problems around us, each one of us is contributing to the problem. The problems in our world are so complex and deep rooted that eventually we realize our hopes for a perfect world will never be realized through our country or government. The only way our problems will be fixed is if it comes from out of this world. Our hope has to come from God. He is the only one who can fix the world and usher in peace, kindness, mercy compassion, health and life. The only king that can fix this planet is King Jesus. We are going to look at King Jesus this morning, but before we do, let's warm up our brain cells by dismissing some false views of the kingdom, false views of what happens to people after they die.

### **What are some false views of the afterlife?**

**Universalism** - This is the belief that when we die, everybody wins. It doesn't matter what you did or who you are. You can walk faithfully with Jesus for 90 years or you can be the uni-bomber. It doesn't matter where you are on the continuum of morality because everybody goes to Heaven, nobody gets stuffed into Hell. Nobody's gonna be punished. Nobody is gonna suffer. God gives everyone a gold star and we go to Heaven and sing the Hallelujah chorus for eternity. Many people believe this. You hear it all the time at funerals. "I am thankful they are no longer suffering. They have gone to a better place." Maybe their true suffering has only begun. Maybe they didn't go to a better place, they

went to a place of torment. If you think about it, this view is pretty sick because it would mean that ethics, kindness, love, mercy, torture, and agony mean absolutely nothing in this world because no matter how you live, everybody wins in the end.

**Annihilationism** - This view means that everybody just dies. Either you die and you immediately cease to exist or you die, suffer for a while and then cease to exist. Either way, there is no eternal punishment and, like a candle, we are snuffed out of existence. In the end, nobody goes to hell, nobody suffers eternally. Nobody is going to stand before a holy and righteous God and give an account. Even though some great theologians like John Stott hold to this view, it is unbiblical.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

Jesus says the same thing.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46 (ESV)

So the Old Testament and the New Testament are clear. Everyone lives eternally. Everyone will resurrect either as God’s friend or God’s foe. Either you will be the object of his fully deserved wrath or his undeserved mercy through Christ, the king. Nobody ceases to exist.

**Reincarnation** - This is the view that when we die, we get recycled. If we did a good job in this life, we recycle into a higher life. If you did a bad job in this life, we recycle into a lower life. Those who believe in reincarnation believe in Karma. Karma is the belief that we are responsible for what happens to us in this

life because all thoughts, actions, and intentions of our past life spill over into this one. When people suffer, they simply need to learn to accept it because they deserve it from their past life.

This is a demonically warped, mentally sick, mentality because it says when you see people suffering, you don't help them. They are suffering for their past mistakes and if you to help them you only free them from punishment they deserve.

The Bible rules out reincarnation in Hebrews 9:27

...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)

**Purgatory** - This is another unbiblical view that is not found in the Bible. It was created by the Catholic church several hundred years ago and is based on a misunderstanding of salvation. Purgatory is the belief that we die and go to a place of punishment to suffer until our sins are purged. The idea that we trust in Christ and still need to suffer for our sins is completely unbiblical.

...But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:26 (ESV)

There is no intermediate purgatory. There is no second chance. We die once and then face judgment. Christ either paid for our sins, once for all, or he didn't pay.

**Soul Sleep** - My friends who are Seventh Day Adventists hold this position. They believe Christians die and then their body and their soul take a really long nap until Jesus returns and body and soul resurrect. In the mean time, they are just sleeping. I have studied this a bit and it is a view that is based

on a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 15:51 and a few other passages where sleep is used as a metaphor for death.

The Bible is clear that when we die, our bodies stay in the grave but the souls of Christians go to be with the Lord.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:21–23 (ESV)

Paul doesn't say that when he dies, he takes a long nap. Paul refutes soul sleep again in 2 Corinthians 5:8.

Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)

**Cartoon Death** - Probably the most pervasive view of life after death is the cartoon version. In that version, we all wear diapers, are given a harp, get pudgy and have a baby face so we can sit on cotton ball clouds and sing a really bad version of Kum-Ba-Yah. If that is what heaven is like, I don't want to be there. It makes Hell look quite appealing

### **What is the truth about the afterlife?**

Now that you have the wrong views, what does the Bible say is the right view? What happens after we die? By the way, I preached a sermon on this over the summer in our *Heaven* series called, *One Minute After You Die*. You can get it off the Christ2RCulture web site. This morning I will just give you the hi-lights version.

The Bible says we are composed of two parts. A material and an immaterial part. We have a body and a soul or spirit. We presently live as a

unified body and soul. When we die, our body goes in the grave and, if Christ is our king, our souls go to be with Christ in heaven. There will be a day when Christ will return to earth and he will resurrect our bodies and reunite our souls to them. The resurrected body will be great. It will be filled with power, not weakness. It will be indestructible.

If Christ is not our king, when we die our body goes in the grave and our soul doesn't go to Hell but it goes to the opening act for Hell, a place called Hades. We see this in Luke 16. One day, when Christ returns, he will resurrect the body and reunite the souls in Hades with an indestructible body. They will be judged and cast into Hell proper where they will exist forever in torment. Daniel 12:2 summarizes it this way.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

Jesus summarizes it this way.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." John 5:25–29 (ESV)

Everybody will live forever. Eventually everyone will get back their real resurrected body, except it will be physically indestructible. Either we will live forever in eternal, conscious, torment in Hell for rejecting King Jesus, or we will live with Jesus as our king on the new heavens and earth where all the worship goes to Jesus.

But I am getting ahead of myself a bit.

### Who is the King?

I am about to do something I probably shouldn't. As many of you know, we are getting ready for a Christmas series after this called *Christmas from the book of Revelation*. I am going to let some of that study bleed into this morning.

Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Revelation. We are going to hit some of the highlights of the book. I want to start by telling you the book is similar to a drama that takes place on two stages. One stage is planet earth, the other stage is Heaven. Most of the weirdos, nut jobs and eschatamaniacs spend all their time talking about the scenes that take place on the stage of earth. These are the guys who have the charts and graphs and detailed predictions about when Jesus is coming back. They are afraid to get a membership tag from the YMCA because they think it might be the mark of the beast. They clean their guns a lot and have plenty of canned food in their basement. This morning, I don't want to focus on the scenes on the earthly stage. They are difficult to interpret. I want to focus on a few of the scenes that take place on the heavenly stage.

The scenes on the heavenly stage are much easier to understand because they all focus on Jesus reigning and ruling in heaven and how Jesus' reign and rule extends over all creation.

In the heavenly scenes, the dominant image is Jesus on the throne. The throne appears 45 times in the book of Revelation and in 17 of the 22 chapters. So the throne is the centerpiece of the heavenly scenes and Jesus is sitting on it.

What proceeds from the throne? All truth and all judgment? What goes back to the throne? All praise, glory and adoration. Why does all this praise and glory go back to the throne? Because of who Jesus is. In the book of Revelation Jesus is called the King of Kings. President Obama took office and said he was surprised at how much power he *didn't* have as the president. Jesus is the other way around. As the king of the kings, there is nothing he is lacking power to do.

**Revelation 1:1** - The book begins by saying, "The revelation of Jesus Christ..." Just so you know, the book isn't primarily about the rapture, the mark of the beast or how to survive the end-times. The book is primarily about Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of Christ. Revelation literally means unveiling. While on earth, Jesus was the humble Galilean peasant who was spat on and crucified for our sins. This book is about taking off the cloak of Christ and unveiling his true identity as king of kings and ruler over heaven and earth. So who is the king? Revelation tells us. Jesus is the king of kings.

### **What is the sign of the kingdom?**

If there is a kingdom, you need two things for one to exist. You need a king, and you need a jurisdiction, that is, something for him to reign over. The kingdom of God is about Jesus our king establishing his rule and reign over all creation, defeating the human and angelic evil powers, bringing order to all, enacting justice, and being worshiped as Lord. What is the sign of the kingdom? How do you know Jesus' kingdom is present? The sign the kingdom is present is the worship of Jesus. Jesus ruling and reigning.



## Revelation 4:10-11

the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." Revelation 4:10–11 (ESV)

The scene is in heaven and the twenty-four elders fall down in worship before Jesus on the throne. Some people believe the number of elders mentioned here is based on the number of priestly families appointed to serve in the Temple. Others say it is representative of the Old Testament and New Testament people of God combined together, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. Let's not get lost in that discussion because it isn't a question God gave us an answer to. What we do know is that elders are always the spiritual leaders or rulers over something. We know these elders are ruling because they have a crown, which signifies they rule something. These guys are some of the top dogs because there is only twenty-four and they are hanging out by the throne. That is on the court seating. Very pricey seats. What do they do with their crowns, the symbol of their authority? They cast it before Jesus.

So even though these guys are big shots, they are powerful ruling elders, they don't put their thumbs in their armpits and get all prideful and say, "look at me!" They take their crowns off and give all the glory to Jesus. Why do they do this? The text tells us why? Because Jesus created all things and it is only by Jesus' will they exist. God could easily vaporize these these big shots in a moment just by changing his mind. The only reason these big shots are leading

anything is because it is a gift from God, so God get's all the glory. Off with the crown, thumbs out of the arm pits, it is all for you Jesus.

This is incredibly instructive for everyone who is a spiritual leader. When you are a spiritual leader you are responsible for a group of people. You are spiritually shepherding them. Plenty of spiritual leaders in the Bible and in modern times get this wrong. They get their thumbs stuck in their arm pits and they think it is about them and that the people they serve exist to serve them. That is stinking pride. Makes them smell like a can of rotten tuna in front of God. The best job any spiritual leader can do for the people is to take off their little crown and cast it before Jesus and say, "Jesus, you are the one worthy to receive all glory and honor and power. I only exist to focus the worship on you and not to try to use a net and catch some of it for myself. The only reason I have this position is your grace, not my wit or humor or wisdom."

So the sign of the kingdom is the worship of Jesus and it begins with the spiritual leaders but it doesn't end there.

#### **Revelation 5:11-14**

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5:11–14 (ESV)

Who's seated on the throne? Jesus! So the spiritual leaders go first and then the angels and the creatures of creation join in. By the time the book is

culminated, there will be billions of people around the throne giving worship to Jesus. How many angels are echoing the elders' worship. Myriads. This is an uncountable number. The circle of worship to Jesus is expanding.

This is like one of the closing scenes of the Chronicles of Narnia when Aslan finally reigns over everything and everybody is submitted to his power and everybody is worshipping him. The sign of the kingdom is the worship of the king. The angels and every creature have joined the chorus.

### **Revelation 7:9-12**

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Revelation 7:9–12 (ESV)

Now we have a huge multitude around the throne worshipping Jesus. Who is this great multitude from every nation, people, tribe and language that worships Jesus? These are the redeemed, Christians, who have Christ as their king and they love to worship him. What are the redeemed singing about? Salvation. Jesus on the throne, he is the one who saved them from hell eternally and hell on earth.

The angels even join in and what do they say? "Amen!" Amen simply means, "Yes, I agree." So the great multitude worships Jesus on his throne and the angels, like a good black choir say, "Umm, Umm... yes, we agree, worship Jesus."

You get the idea that we have a pretty intense worship set going on here with a growing crowd of worshippers.

#### **Revelation 15:2-4**

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” Revelation 15:2–4 (ESV)

By the way, notice there is some very cool architecture in heaven. Definitely not your hospital type white walls with fluorescent lighting. A sea of glass mingled with fire sounds like it was created by one of those funky pop artists. As you study Revelation, you will learn heaven looks nothing like a church building. It is beautiful. It is startling visual brilliance, audio brilliance with the power of thunder. It is a very creative, full of life place. It better be, after all, it's God's throne room.

What I find a little funny here is that for a while I worked in a denomination that didn't like instruments in worship. They thought it distracted from worship. I think instruments add to worship. Unfortunately, my friends who sing everything without an instrument will be forced to join the band if they are in this group because Jesus gives them a harp. If Jesus gives you an instrument and tells you to play, the only question to ask is, “What song he would like to hear?”

The song Jesus has them play is the song of Moses. The song of redemption. Jesus is the one who saved them. So everybody is around the throne praising Jesus.

## Revelation 19:1-5

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.” Revelation 19:1–5 (ESV)

Everything culminates with this rejoicing in Heaven. He is the one who saved us. All glory and power belong to him. Praise God for who He is. Praise God for what He has done. His judgments are just. He judged the great prostitute, which is false religion. Everybody is praising Jesus.

So Jesus is the King on the throne and the sign of his kingdom is his reign and rule. Jesus’ reign and rule is extending. His rule is extending through his reigning in the hearts of men as he becomes the king of our lives. So life after death, with Jesus, is a natural transition because when we die, we go home to be with our king.

So from 2,000 years ago and twelve disciples, the reign of Christ has extended to several billion people who call Jesus their savior because they acknowledge him as king of the universe. They have stepped off the throne of their life and asked Jesus to take his rightful seat there.

## Beginning, Middle, Beginning

Right after this scene, things begin to wrap up in Revelation, there is a great meal called, the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*. Before we look at that, we need to understand how the Bible tells us the story of history will go. Most of our

western stories are told beginning, middle, end. The Bible story is beginning, middle, beginning.

You see, in Genesis, God created this creation. In the end of Revelation, we find God recreates this into a new creation. In the beginning, God had a garden. In the end, God has a city with a garden in the center. In the beginning, God had a tree of life and we were banished from it because of sin. In the end, the tree of life reappears and we can take from it freely. In the beginning, we ate a meal with Satan. In the end, we eat a meal with Jesus. The point is we sinned and sin infected and ruined everything. Through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Satan is conquered and everything is restored to God's original intention and purpose, but it is vastly improved. So improved that heaven and earth are united together and we live with God. In the beginning Satan and sin could enter the world, in the end, Satan and sin are bound from it forever.

We were made to worship God, but rather than having Jesus as the center, we put ourselves in the center. Rather than living for Him, we live for ourselves. In the end, the kingdom of God is about everything being reordered with not ourselves as the center but Jesus as the center of everything. In the beginning, we ate a meal with Satan, in the end, we eat a meal with Jesus. That is Revelation 19:6.

History reaches its climax with the worship of Jesus and Jesus steps off his throne and the table is set and we eat a meal with him, as His friends. It's called the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*. At that meal, the church is called the

bride and Jesus is presented as a loving groom who passionately and lovingly, at great cost, pursued and won his bride, that is us.

The Bible story is beginning, middle, beginning but the final beginning is better than the original beginning ever was.

You and I have a wonderful opportunity to sit at that table with Jesus. Isaiah said that on that day there will be the choicest of meats and the finest of wines. Jesus Christ has set the table for his friends. The kingdom commences with the king throwing a party for us!

There is something exciting said by a little known prophet called Zephaniah. He says that on that day the Lord will rejoice over us with singing. Now, I can't prove this because exactly what, "that day" is referring to in Zephaniah is a little unclear to me, but that day, may be this day. After we've worshipped, praised and celebrated Jesus with the multitudes, he sets the table and we are seated as his friends with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ from all of time and all of the nations and languages, and countries and cultures are seated with us. I wonder if, at that moment, the prophecy of Zephaniah will be fulfilled and Jesus will stand and sing with gladness over us. We will sit there absolutely overwhelmed at Jesus, and the beauty of heaven, and the love of Jesus, who died for us, freed us from the power of sin and he purchased our salvation by his blood.

If you thought life after death for a Christian was sitting on a cloud, strumming a harp, you are sadly mistaken.

Would you like to be part of the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*? Do you long for the day when Jesus will step down off his throne and sing his love song to you?

The Bible says it is the easiest thing and the hardest thing to do. It is easy because it is simply trusting in Jesus' death on the cross to pay for your sin. It is hard, because it is asking him to be king in your life. It is stepping off the throne in your heart and saying, "My life isn't about me, It is to be lived for you."

Will we stumble and fall and boot Jesus off the throne of our heart and do our own thing? Of course, but we repent, get down off the throne and ask the king who loves us to lead us again.

As I close, would you invite king Jesus to be the king of your life? Will you join me at the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*?

### Prayer

Jesus, thank you for being the author of salvation. Thank you for forgiving all my sin for all of my life. I repent of my sin, I ask your forgiveness and I ask your death on the cross to be the once for all payment for my sin. This morning, I also step off the throne of my heart and as best I know how, I ask you to be the king of my life. From this day forward, I ask you to lead and guide my life. Help me to follow you. Amen.

Next week we finish the series. We will finish our overview of Revelation as we learn what happens when the king of king returns. We will learn about the final judgment we all will face. We will explore the final state of either eternal conscious punishment in Hell or eternal conscious life in Heaven on earth.

As we go, let me pray for us.





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